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|---|--|
| 87. Common Kingfisher, <i>Alcedo atthis</i> .               | 106. Jungle Crow, <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i> .              |
| 88. Whitebreasted Kingfisher, <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i> .   | 107. Common Wood Shrike, <i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i> . |
| 89. Bluetailed Bee-Eater, <i>Merops philippinus</i> .       | 108. Common Iora, <i>Aegithina tiphia</i> .                  |
| 90. Green Bee-Eater, <i>Merops orientalis</i> .             | 109. Redvented Bulbul, <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i> .             |
| 91. Indian Roller, <i>Coracias benghalensis</i> .           | 110. Whiteheaded Babbler, <i>Turdoides affinis</i> .         |
| 92. Crimsonbreasted Barbet, <i>Megalaima haemacephala</i> . | 111. Tailor Bird, <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i> .               |
| 93. Hoopoe, <i>Upupa epops</i> .                            | 112. Green Warbler, <i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i> .            |
| 94. Goldenbacked Woodpecker, <i>Dinopium benghalense</i> .  | 113. Magpie Robin, <i>Copsychus saularis</i> .               |
| 95. Redwinged Bush Lark, <i>Mirafra erythroptera</i> .      | 114. Indian Robin, <i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i> .            |
| 96. Ashyrowned Finch-Lark, <i>Eremopterix grisea</i> .      | 115. Paddyfield Pipit, <i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i> .       |
| 97. Rufoustailed Finch-Lark, <i>Ammomanes phoenicurus</i> . | 116. Richard's Pipit, <i>Anthus n. richardi</i> .            |
| 98. Eastern Skylark, <i>Alauda gulgula</i> .                | 117. Yellow Wagtail, <i>Motacilla flava</i> .                |
| 99. Collared Sand Martin, <i>Riparia riparia</i> .          | 118. Pied Wagtail, <i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i> .        |
| 100. Swallow, <i>Hirundo rustica</i> .                      | 119. Purplerumped Sunbird, <i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i> .     |
| 101. Black Drongo, <i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i> .              | 120. Loten's Sunbird, <i>Nectarinia lotenia</i> .            |
| 102. Common Myna, <i>Acridotheres tristis</i> .             | 121. Purple Sunbird, <i>Nectarinia asiatica</i> .            |
| 103. Brahminy Myna, <i>Sturnus pagodarum</i> .              | 122. House Sparrow, <i>Passer domesticus</i> .               |
| 104. Indian Tree Pie, <i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i> .        | 123. Yellowthroated Sparrow, <i>Petronia xanthocollis</i> .  |
| 105. House Crow, <i>Corvus splendens</i> .                  | 124. Baya Weaver Bird, <i>Ploceus philippinus</i> .          |
|   | 125. Whitethroated Munia, <i>Lonchura malabarica</i> .       |

## 18. THE REDFRONTED BABBLER *STACHYRIS RUFIFRONS* AND REDHEADED BABBLER *S. RUFICEPS* IN NORTHERN THAILAND

### INTRODUCTION

In south-east Asia there is a pair of very similar species of rufouscapped babblers of the genus *Stachyris* which nevertheless have diagnostic characters (Harrison 1985). The more northerly species, the Redheaded Babbler *S. ruficeps*, has a uniform chestnut cap extending back to the nape and merging with the mantle. The pale throat merges into the paler parts of the ochraceous-buff bordered upper breast. The more southerly Redfronted Babbler *S. rufifrons* has a chestnut cap extending back no further than the hind-crown and showing indistinct dark streaking along the feather shafts. The pale throat is separated from the rest of the underside by a more distinct zone of slightly rufous buff on the upper breast.

*S. ruficeps* occurs from the Yangtze Valley

southwards in China to Yunnan and the northern parts of Vietnam and Laos. Westwards it occurs through the Himalayas to Sikkim and into north-eastern and north-western Burma. It has an isolate population in southern Vietnam.

*S. rufifrons* occurs in the Himalayas from Nepal eastwards into Assam, north-eastern and southern Burma, northern Laos and Vietnam, and into Malaya, Sumatra and Burma. It has an isolate population in southern Laos.

The two species appear to overlap in range in areas from northern Laos to Sikkim. There seems to be an altitudinal difference in breeding range, following the general rule with the higher latitude species *S. ruficeps* breeding at higher altitudes where they overlap. Baker (1922) writing of their range in India and Burma, stated that *ruficeps* bred from upwards

of 760-915 m, and *rufifrons* up to 610 m. He stated that *rufifrons* may breed "... occasionally higher than this and nests of both ... may be found in the same jungle." This would appear to infer local sympatry when breeding, but since Baker's work has shown some evidence of poor species differentiation (Harrison and Parker 1966) and apparent deception (Harrison 1966, Harrison and Parker 1967) in other instances, there may be some reservation about accepting the statement without additional confirmation.

#### *S. rufifrons* IN NORTHERN THAILAND

Deignan encountered a problem concerning the distribution of these species in northern Thailand and, in attempting to solve it, altered some of his views between an early paper (1939), his list of birds of northern Thailand (1945), and his Thailand checklist (1963) and list of Timaliinae in Peters's Checklist (1964) without fully justifying them.

He collected a specimen at 1340 m on Doi Ang Ka, a high peak of the Thanon Thong Chai range 56 km WSW of Chiang Mai, and saw other pairs in thick vegetation. He assigned the specimen (now in the Field Museum, Chicago) to the nominate subspecies *S. rufifrons rufifrons* Hume 1873 which occurs from the Burmese Shan States into western Thailand.

Meyer de Schauensee had collected a specimen at 1950 m on Doi Hom Pok, a peak of the Daen Lao range on the Thailand/Burma frontier about 77 km WNW of Chiang Rai. Gyldenstolpe had specimens from Pha Kho, east of the Khun Tai range, and Doi Pha Sakaeng, both from the undergrowth of dense evergreen forest in valleys. These were typical specimens of *S. rufifrons* and Deignan (1945) assigned all three to the subspecies *S. r. in-*

*suspecta* Deignan 1939, the type of which was a specimen of the isolate form from the Bolovens Plateau of southern Laos. Later (1963, 1964) he transferred them to the subspecies *S. r. adjuncta* Deignan 1939, the type of which was from Phong Saby in northern Laos.

On Doi Chiang Dao, a 2182 m peak in the Thanon Thong Chai range 40 miles north by west of Chiang Mai, three birds were collected at 1166-1676 m, one by Meyer de Schauensee in grassland, the others by Deignan in tall bamboo forest. They resembled *S. rufifrons*, but were darker and greyer than any described subspecies. Deignan first assigned them to a new species *S. rodolphei* Deignan 1939, but in 1945 treated this as a subspecies of *S. rufifrons*, and in 1963 and 1964 reverted to species status for it.

There would therefore appear to be evidence from various scattered localities across the highlands of northern Thailand of specimens of *S. rufifrons*, assigned to various poorly-differentiated subspecies, with a distinctive and apparently isolate form on Doi Chiang Dao.

#### THE SECOND SPECIES ON DOI CHIANG DAO

On Doi Chinag Dao in 1931, on steep grass-covered slopes at c. 1829 m above the latitudinal range noted for *S. rufifrons rodolphei*, Deignan encountered a small party of *Stachyris* babblers and collected one specimen. He described it as "mutilated" and later as "fragments" and it was not preserved with his other specimens. He stated "It was identified in the flesh as a form of *Stachyris ruficeps* as understood by Stuart Baker (FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA. Birds, Ed. 2, Vol. 1, 1922, p. 268), and my identification of the fragments was subsequently confirmed by Chasen at the Raffles Museum."

Baker, in the work cited, gives a key and descriptions of two subspecies *S. ruficeps* and two of *rufifrons*. There should have been no problems of identity involved. From his statement there would appear to be no reason to doubt that Deignan had identified the presence of a party of *S. ruficeps* at higher altitudes on Doi Chiang Dao, with the distinctive isolate of *S. rufifrons*, *S. r. rodolphei* at lower altitudes, reflecting the altitudinal preferences evident elsewhere.

#### SUBSEQUENT TAXONOMIC CHANGES

The apparent distribution of the two species with an isolate of *S. ruficeps* in northern Thailand, sympatric with a distinctive population of *S. rufifrons*, but apparently separated altitudinally, would appear to be a fairly simple one.

However, in his 1945 study of birds of northern Thailand Deignan, fourteen years after his examination of the specimen he had identified as *S. ruficeps* and not subsequently retained, stated "I have no doubt that the example belonged to the race later named *insuspecta*." He does not say why, nor why he assigned a specimen he had identified as *S. ruficeps* to a subspecies then considered to belong to *S. rufifrons*. In this work he had treated *rodolphei* as a subspecies of *S. rufifrons* and now had a problem of sympatry which he solved by assigning *insuspecta* as a whole to *S. ruficeps*, appearing to ignore the fact that all but one of the specimens involved were typical of *S. ruficeps*.

In his arrangement of the babblers in the Thailand checklist (1963) and Peters's checklist (1964) he changed his mind again, and apparently wished to return these birds to *rufifrons*. He transferred them to the subspecies *adjuncta* of the latter species. He makes no mention of the Doi Chiang Dao *ruficeps* specimen, nor of

the locality, but may have been aware that he might have a problem of sympatric subspecies in his new arrangement, since he now treats *rodolphei* as a full species.

The problems raised in his mind by the Doi Chiang Dao birds would seem to be the only rational explanation for his division (1963, 1964) of the subspecies of *S. rufifrons* to form two species, using *ambigua* Harington 1915 as the second specific name. In doing so he retained *pallescens*, *obscura*, *poliogaster* and *sarawacensis* in *S. rufifrons*; and transferred *planicola*, *adjuncta* and *insuspecta* to his new *S. ambigua*. Dickinson (pers. comm.) has suggested that he may have been influenced to some extent by the relative proximity in northern Thailand of the specimens he had assigned to *S. r. rufifrons* and *S. r. adjuncta* (or *insuspecta*); but since, as Dickinson pointed out, the former is in the drainage of the Chao Phaya and the latter in that of the Mae Khong, they are not sympatric, a fact of which Deignan must have been aware.

At no time did Deignan state the characters which would justify the recognition of two species based on the subspecies normally assigned to *S. rufifrons*. From an examination of skins it seems possible that he was attempting to use the presence of absence of some yellowish tint in the plumage of the populations in order to separate them. He appears to have ignored a more striking pigmentation variation of this kind in the subspecies of *S. ruficeps*. There appears to be no justification for such a separation other than as an attempt to overcome a taxonomic problem which he had in any case solved for himself by elevating *rodolphei* to a full species.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Further material from the Doi Chiang Dao region would be useful. From a study of

specimens, and from the information given by Deignan on the specimens involved, it would appear that in northern Thailand *S. rufifrons* is present in various localities, showing some local variation, with a distinctive isolate on Doi Chiang Dao which has been treated at times as a separate species *S. rodolphei*. An isolated population of *S. ruficeps* may be present at higher altitudes on the same peak.

If Deignan's unsubstantiated second thoughts (1945) about the second isolate on Doi Chiang Dao were correct, then one would need to envisage a double invasion by *S. rufifrons* in this locality with *S. rodolphei* as a species arising from the earlier invasion.

In either instance there would appear to be no justification for a subdivision of the subspecies of *S. rufifrons* to form two species as suggested by Deignan (1964). It has not been generally accepted. Ali and Ripley (1971) treat *ambigua* as a subspecies of *rufifrons*.

## SUMMARY

The Redfronted Babbler *Stachyris rufifrons*

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C. J. O. HARRISON

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### 19. THE INDIAN GREY TIT (*PARUS MAJOR*) ON AN ABANDONED HONEY COMB

In the compound of the Irrigation Department's guest house at Nandur-Madhameshwar (Nasik District), there are a number of honey combs on the branches of two large ficus trees at a height of over 50 feet. On 11th February 1985, while we were watching two spotted owlets on an adjacent tree, we noticed a Grey Tit (*Parus major*) perched on the top half of an abandoned honey comb. Perching at an angle of 135° to the ground, the tit kept probing into the hexagonal cells in the comb. Though we are unable to state with any degree of certainty that there were no insects present in the comb, we are reasonably certain that there were none. This is because the top half of the comb was white, and therefore totally devoid of honey, the bottom portion of the comb was brown and may have contained some honey residue, and therefore maybe some insects also. Secondly, during a previous trip to Nandur-Madhameshwar in July 1984,

we had picked up a honey comb from the ground from practically the same spot. This honey comb was also empty both of honey and insects, and the fact that the entire comb was intact indicated that the comb had not been knocked down from the tree by any human agency for the sake of its honey.

Sálím Ali and S. Dillon Ripley, in the HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (Vol. 9, pp. 169) state that the food of the grey tit comprises of "insects, caterpillars, seeds, flower buds and berries". We are unable to find any other reference on the food of the Indian Grey Tit. Mr Humayun Abdulali, when consulted, was unable to recall the sighting of a grey tit on a honey comb.

We would therefore conclude that though there is a possibility that the grey tit may not have been feeding on the wax, the sighting of the tit on the honey comb itself should be recorded.

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210 VEER SAVARKAR MARG,  
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74, TURNER ROAD,  
BANDRA, BOMBAY 400 050,  
July 10, 1985.

DEBI GOENKA

HETA PANDIT

### 20. HOST PLANTS USED BY BAYA WEAVER BIRD (*PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS* LINN.) FOR NESTING IN EASTERN RAJASTHAN (Breeding period 1982)

A study has been done by me on plants preferred by *Ploceus philippinus* Linn. for nesting in two districts of Eastern Rajasthan viz. Alwar and Bharatpur. For this purpose I cycled some 280 km on the following roads:

1. 30 km on N.H. 11 from Bharatpur to Halena; 2. 110 km on S.H. 14 from Bharatpur to Alwar; 3. 60 km on S.H. 14 from Alwar to Behror; 4. 20 km on N.H. 8 from Behror to Neemrana; 5. 30 km on S.H. 13 from Sariska